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ABSTRACT

In recent years, television spot advertising has become an important part of political campaigns because it allows candidates to select the most favorable content, medium, time, and audience available to them. In the 1984 United States Senate campaign in Michigan, both the incumbent, Democrat Carl Levin, and the challenger, Republican Jack Lousma, ran political spots that attempted to present their own attributes favorably and to accent their opponent's weaknesses. Lousma, because of a hotly contested Republican primary, was on the defensive and tried to erase his image of being an inexperienced outsider. Lousma wavered until mid-October, when he became more direct and more effective. Levin was portrayed from the beginning as an experienced, effective leader. Because of this, he did win the 1984 election and a six-year term in Congress. (DF)

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In their hallmark study of the 1940 presidential campaign, Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet concluded that "Campaign managers devise comprehensive strategies and ingenious tactics in order to make their will the will of the electorate."[1] Twenty years later, the use of paid-for political communications was still in the nascent stage, when Mullen's research indicated that "additional professionalism might make political advertising more effective."[2] By the 1980's, Diamond and Yates found substantial evidence that "just about every major campaign now has media specialists working for each candidate,"[3] preparing paid-for communications, the political advertising spots of the television era.

The increased use of such spots, give candidates a semblance of control, for they can select the message to be presented, the medium to be used, the time the message is to be delivered, and the audience to be reached. Messages disseminated through speeches, news conferences, interviews and press releases are also presented by the candidate, however, the resultant news coverage is controlled by the media gatekeepers. Consequently, the importance of such activities has been diminished, and televised political spots have taken on a far greater role in campaigns.

Bowers noted that few candidates feel safe supporting such advertising, "but few feel safe in ignoring it."[4] Charles Guggenheim, a producer of such spots for major political candidates, concurred, stating, "No one in his right mind, in a senatorial or

gubernatorial or presidential election, can not use television."[5]

The 1984 Senatorial Campaign

The 1984 campaign for the U.S.Senate seat in Michigan involved the incumbent, Democrat Carl Levin, and the challenger, Republican Jack Lousma. Levin spent $3,218,665[6] and Lousma $1,765,788[7], with the concentration of both candidates' monies placed in television spot advertising.

The campaign was one of background, experience and ideological contrasts, providing each candidate the opportunity to present distinctly different advertising messages. Levin, a liberal Democrat, had served as a member of the Detroit Common Council before becoming senator in 1978. Lousma, a conservative, although born and raised in Michigan, had lived outside the state for the previous twenty-five years, and had served in the military and as an astronaut. The incumbent had voted against President Reagan on many issues, while Lousma avowed unwavering support, if elected.

Levin had been unopposed for the Democratic nomination, while the intensely contested Republican primary had forced Lousma to defend himself as an "outsider", and left the political novice with a sizeable campaign debt. During the general election, Levin had far more monies to acquire the coveted television time, than did Lousma, who saw a change of campaign directors disrupt its continuity.

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The Lousma Campaign

In 1927, Harold Lasswell theorized that "the problem of the propagandist is to multiply all suggestions favorable to the attitudes he wishes to produce and strengthen, and to restrict all suggestions which are unfavorable to them."[8] As Lousma's "propagandist", Press Secretary Keith Hartwell realized that the incumbent and his challenger were far apart on the issues of taxes, defense and spending. Hartwell wanted to make the election "a referendum on those three issues," which he surmised would favor Lousma, and stated "for us to win, the message must be specific and much more potent" than Levin's.[9]

However, Lousma's campaign had to first surmount the problems brought up in the primary, i.e., he was an inexperienced outsider, and then promote his candidacy. To this end, political spots were created which emphasized his Michigan background, and his service to the country, such as the following:

VIDEO	AUDIO
SHOT IN SPACECRAFT - "GO BLUE" BUMPER STICKER ON WINDOW	LOUSMA: I want to say hello to all of the great folks and relatives back in Michigan.
HOUSE PHOTO	ANNOUNCER: Grand Rapids' Jack Lousma.
LOUSMA AS BOY PHOTO.	Ann Arbor's Jack Lousma. Michigan's
PHOTO IN FOOTBALL UNIFORM	Jack Lousma. After 25 years active
PHOTO IN UNIFORM/WITH REAGAN	duty in the Marines, after 28 million
ACTION SHOT IN SPACE	miles in space, hopes to keep serving

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VIDEO	AUDIO
LOUSMA WALKING IN SPACE UNIFORM	his country, by serving his state in the senate.
LOUSMA TALKING WITH FACTORY WORKERS	LOUSMA: Michigan can do the job. I want to be involved in making that happen. Whenever it's challenged.
SUPER: JACK LOUSMA LEADERSHIP FOR MICHIGAN	Whenever it's had goals. Michigan has been able to do the job.

The 30-second spot interwove a University of Michigan, "Go Blue" bumper sticker, with an introductory greeting to the people of Michigan, and identification of Lousma with two Michigan cities, all designed to extirpate the stigma of being an outsider. Other spots began with, "Michigan's Jack Lousma", "Michigan's astronaut, Jack Lousma", and Jack Lousma, leadership for Michigan.", while others showed typical Michigan scenes throughout.

While the spot helped reduce the outsider image, it did not directly portray Lousma as a leader, although the photograph of him with Reagan, did offer the audience the message that Lousma was associated with leadership, and was somehow connected with the incumbent president.

Lousma's attempt to establish himself as an opponent of greater taxation, was set forth in a spot entitled "Tax Revolt." It was weak, for it avoided presenting the contrasts between his position and that of Levin's. It may have inadvertently portrayed Lousma as being

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politically naive, as he strongly admonishes the state government to "live within its means", when in reality, a U.S. senator has little influence and control over state government expenditures.

In a successful campaign, advertising professionals decide what should be said about their candidate, "thereby controlling the perceptions of the voters about him."[10] Prior to the campaign, Hartwell was concerned that because of Lousma's military background, he would be perceived as a "warrior, and not for peace."[11]

The 60-second spot, "Master Painter", attempted to dispel that image, and create one of Lousma as a man of vision and peace. Hartwell said the spot was a "high risk", since it was ethereal, with only one brief visual to identify Lousma, and no spoken mention of either his name or his candidacy.

Although Lousma was not seen after the opening few seconds, except for a few brief moments near the closing, his voice was heard throughout the spot, while the video showed the earth behind a slowly circling spacecraft. Lousma spoke of what he had seen as an astronaut, "white of the snow", "patchwork of farmers' fields", and painted deserts", all created as "the master painter painted them years ago." He spoke of no boundaries, and that having been an astronaut, he was " a lot moresensitive to the needs of people" and "the needs of peace in the world."

While the spot may have accurately expressed Lousma's innermost feelings, it completely ignored Hartwell's warning that any chance of victory rested with the delivery of specific, potent messages. While "image commercials do appear to result in more content re-

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call than do issue commercials"[12], the image depicted in "Master Painter" was an amorphous and confusing one.

In other spots, there was also little or no candidate identification. While his name would be briefly superimposed over the picture at the opening of some spots, and at the ending of others, in most instances there was no reference to him as a candidate for the U.S. senate. Late in the campaign, a closing line referred to him as, "JACK LOUSMA, Leadership for Michigan."

The campaign did not produce a political spot which identified him as "Jack Lousma for U.S. Senate", until October 18, 1984, less than three weeks before the general election. One of those spots, was a 30-second presentation, "Reagan Endorsement".

VIDEO	AUDIO
WORDS ANNOUNCER IS SPEAKING APPEAR ON SCREEN - WHITE ON A BLACK BACKGROUND AND SLOWLY CRAWL FROM BOTTOM TO TOP OF SCREEN AND DISAPPEAR	ANNOUNCER: In a moment, the president. But first you should know that Michigan's senator Carl Levin voted against President Reagan's tax cut and against the Reagan economic recovery program. In fact, Carl Levin has voted more often against President Reagan than any other member of the United States Senate. Now, a special message from the President of the United States.
REAGAN AT DESK IN WHITE HOUSE SUPER OF "JACK LOUSMA U.S. SENATE"	REAGAN: If you're voting for me for president, I hope you won't vote against me in the senate race. Michigan needs Jack Lousma in the senate, and I do, too.

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This was Lousma's strongest spot, for it labeled Levin directly as being against tax cuts and the president. At the same time, Reagan linked his own reelection with the need to have his supporter, Jack Lousma, in the U.S. senate. By juxtaposing Lousma with the popular, incumbent president, he subliminally projected an image of being a leader, while making his name and his candidacy better known.

Levin's Campaign Manager, Robert O'Leary, thought that the spot was a good one, and that"Reagan specifically speaking about Lousma, tended to give him credibility."[13]

Hartwell concluded that "Lousma became stronger at the end",[14] and perhaps if more dynamic, candidate-identifiable spots had been presented earlier in the campaign, the unknown challenger would have had a stronger chance to gain victory in his campaign.

The Levin Campaign

Carl Levin's campaign capitalized on the negative attributes of Lousma's candidacy, e.i., being unknown, inexperienced, and an outsider, by creating political spots which emphasized that Levin possessed all of their positive counterparts. Levin had always been a Michigan resident, with years of political experience gained in city and nationally elected offices.

Levin's messages made the audiences aware that he was either "Standing up for Michigan", was "A proven fighter for Michigan", or that "He's proven he cares about us." While those theme lines varied throughout the campaign, the spots emphasized that Levin had always worked for the people of Michigan.

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The multipurpose spot "Jobs", showed Levin as the proven fighter, and also projected an image of a senator who worked for all of the people of the state.

VIDEO	AUDIO
MAP OF MICHIGAN-STARS APPEAR AS TOWNS ARE IDENTIFIED PHOTOS SHOWN WHEN EACH ITEM IS DESCRIBED	ANNOUNCER: Escanaba. Alpena. Ann Arbor. Detroit. Because of Senator Carl Levin, they're building navy cranes in the upper peninsula...Air Force electronics in Grand Rapids...tank parts in Lansing...and tanks in Warren. They built a new armory in Big Rapids and much more.
STARS SHOWN ON MAP AS EACH NAME IS READ	Bay City. Grayling. Empire. Mount Clemens, Grosse Isle.
LIVE WITH LEVIN AT AIR BASE WITH TWO OFFICERS	Carl Levin sponsored 25 conferences to help Michigan business get Pentagon contracts. Contracts that mean jobs. While
LEVIN PHOTO IN UPPER LEFT "DEMOCRAT CARL LEVIN SENATOR A PROVEN FIGHTER FOR MICHIGAN" SUPERED	Michigan still has a long way to go, with Carl Levin we have a proven fighter who will keep on working, until the job is done.

"Jobs" also counteracted Lousma's mention of Ann Arbor and Grand Rapids in his commercials, by not only highlighting their names, but showing that Levin had already been serving their people as senator.

Several spots had Levin at senate meetings, walking with colleagues in Washington, or in his U.S. senate office. These depicted him as an experience professional, familiar with the work, discussing issues of importance.

"Roots", a 30-second spot, focused on Levin's Michigan background, and without saying so, implied that Lousma possessed out-of-state credentials. It was produced on October 18, 1984, four days after Detroit had won the World Series, and pictured both Levin and his wife wearing Tiger hats, conveying the hidden message that Levin was also a winner, supporting a winning Michigan entity.

To counteract the "Reagan Endorsement" spot which described Levin as being against a tax cut, Levin ran one entitled "Taxes", in which Levin closed with, "I'll fight against any tax that's unfair to the working people of Michigan," re-establishing himself as the fighter for the people of Michigan.

Some of Levin's political spots criticized Lousma directly, but were quickly withdrawn when research indicated that both supporters and undecided voters were put off by the tactic. Negative advertising is mostly counterproductive. It not only firms up support for the attacked candidate by those leaning in his direction, but as Diamond and Yates observed, when incumbents battle little known challengers, those kind of spots "increase the opponent's identification, without reducing his support."[15]

Levin took a great risk by running the 30-second spot, "Toyota", which directly attacked Lousma during the last two weeks of the campaign. Levin's campaign team learned that Lousma had earned $85,883 for a speaking tour in Japan in 1983, and found a videotape of one speech where Lousma stated that "I do have a Toyota automobile." That line was integrated into the following spot:

VIDEO	AUDIO
NEWSPAPER HEADLINE "AUTO JOBS DISAPPEAR DESPITE RECOVERY" LEVIN AT MEETINGS BEATING FISTS IN FRONT OF A MIKE-TESTIFYING SUPER: TOYOTA HALL OCTOBER, 1983. LOUSMA IN UPPER LEFT, JAPANESE PEOPLE IN AUDIENCE CLOSE UP OF LEVIN WITH OTHER SENATORS AT HEARING LEVIN IN UPPER RIGHT SUPER: SENATOR CARL LEVIN, A PROVEN FIGHTER FOR MICHIGAN	ANNOUNCER: In October 1983, 133 thousand auto workers were unemployed. Senator Carl Levin was in Washington fighting to strengthen the American auto industry. Jack Lousma was in Japan, giving a speech at Toyota Hall. LOUSMA: I feel, as a matter of fact, that I have a small investment in this hall. Because, you see, back home in the United States, I do have a Toyota automobile. ANNOUNCER: We deserve a senator who understands our problems and has proven he will fight for Michigan. We have one, in Carl Levin.

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"Toyota" placed unemployed, Michigan auto workers with Carl Levin fighting for their jobs, against Lousma speaking to the competition in Japan, seemingly proclaiming his loyalty to them. The intent was to show that Lousma neither understood the people of Michigan nor their problems, while Levin was the proven fighter.

The controversial spot garnered the campaign's heaviest media coverage throughout the state, giving Lousma questionable publicity he could have never afforded to buy. He retaliated by telling reporters that the advertising was false, the attack "outrageous and vicious", and that Levin should withdraw it.[16] Levin countered with, "This is probably the first campaign in political history when a candidate complained when his opponent quoted him accurately."[17]

Hartwell thought that the spot both hurt and helped the Lousma campaign. While the challenger's image with blue collar automobile workers would be damaged, a fair number of financial supporters may have been convinced that Levin "was desperate enough" to run a "dishonest advertisement", giving the impression that Levin was "going too far."[18] The spot may have cost Levin some moderate Republican voters, as well as Toyota and other foreign car owners.

While the net result of using this negative spot is debatable, the Levin campaign in total presented its candidate in a positive manner, and in doing so, convinced a majority of Michigan voters to return Carl Levin for six more years in the U.S. Senate.

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Summary

Television spot advertising has become an integral part of political campaigns, allowing the candidate to select the most favorable content, medium, time and audience available.

In the 1984 U.S. senate campaign in Michigan, both the incumbent, Democrat Carl Levin, and the challenger, Republican Jack Lousma, ran political spots which attempted to favorably present their positive attributes, and at times, to accent their opponent's weaknesses.

A difficult primary, placed Lousma on the defensive, trying to erase the negative image of being an inexperienced outsider. The debt that was incurred, left him far behind Levin in monies to be used in the general election. This was especially harmful, since the level of spending of the non-incumbent "has a greater impact on the outcome of elections than does that of incumbents."[19]

Lousma's campaign message vacillated until mid-October, when he became more direct, which helped erase some of the negative qualities attributed to him. With the positive "Reagan Endorsement" spot, Lousma was finally able to project an image of being a creditable candidate.

From the start, Levin was positioned as an experienced leader for Michigan. In his spots, he was senatorial in his actions, appearance and pronouncements, constantly reiterating what he done for Michigan since being elected as senator in 1978.

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Levin presented the controversial "Toyota" spot near the end of the campaign, which directly attacked the challenger's ability to understand the problems facing the state. While it caused the most fervent news coverage of the campaign, the effects of its usage, could not be accurately determined.

Ironically, both Lousma's positive "Reagan Endorsement" and Levin's negative "Toyota" spots were produced on October 18, 1984, and it was during the period from October 1st through the November 6th general election, that Levin's lead in the polls of 54 percent to 34 percent, diminished to a 52.7 percent to a 47.3 percent final victory margin.

To credit any particular political advertisement with being responsible for victory or defeat, would be an unproven assumption. Political advertising professionals, such as John Deardourff, whose firm produced many of the Lousma spots, admitted that even the "experts" are not even close to being able to determine which spots work best.[20]

In the 1984 U.S. senate campaign in Michigan, the experienced incumbent Carl Levin, ran more of the right spots than did his novitiate challenger Jack Lousma, to help gain a narrow election victory.

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Footnotes

1 Paul Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet, The People's Choice (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), p. 120.

2 James J. Mullen, "How Candidates for the Senate use Newspaper Advertising," Journalism Quarterly, 1963, Vol. 40, No. 4, p. 537.

3 Edwin Diamond and Stephen Bates, The Spot: The Rise of Political Advertising on Television (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1984), p. 350.

4 Thomas A. Bowers, "Candidate Advertising: The Agenda is the Message," in Donald L. Shaw and Maxwell E. McCombs, eds., The Emergence of American Political Issues: The Agenda-Setting Function of the Press (St. Paul: West Publishing, 1977), p. 53.

5 Diamond and Bates, The Spot, p. 353.

6 Reports of Receipts and Disbursements, Friends of Senator Carl Levin, 11 February 1985.

7 Reports of Receipts and Disbursements, Jack Lousma for Senate Committee, 25 February 1985.

8 Harold D. Lasswell, "The Theory of Political Propaganda," American Political Science Review, 1927, Vol. XXI, p. 630.

9 Keith Hartwell, interview with author, Lansing, Michigan, 5 October 1984.

10 William H. Flanigan and Nancy H. Zingale, Political Behavior of the American Electorate, (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1979, 4th ed.), p. 132.

11 Hartwell interview.

12 Linda Lee Kaid and Keith R. Sanders, "Political Television Commercials: An Experimental Study of Type and Length," Communication Research, Vol. 5, No. 1, (January 1978); 62.

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[13] Robert O'Leary, taped interview with author, Lansing, Michigan, 7 January 1985.

[14] Hartwell interview.

[15] Diamond and Bates, The Spot, p. 360.

[16] "Levin imports . needle," Detroit Free Press, 30 October 1984, p. 1A.

[17] "Mr. Nice Guy gets tough in campaign ads," Detroit News, 31 October 1984, p. 3A.

[18] Hartwell interview.

[19] Gary C. Jacobson, "The Effects of Campaign Spending in Congressional Elections," American Political Science Review, Vol. 72, No. 2 (June 1978): 488.

[20] Diamond and Bates, The Spot, p. 357.

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